Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages | Commissariat aux langues officielles

Ottawa, September 25, 2001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The stage is set, now it's show time! Annual Report of the Commissioner of Official Languages

The Commissioner of Official Languages, Dr. Dyane Adam, tabled her 2000-2001 annual report in Parliament today. Dr. Adam notes that the federal government has heard and understood the alarm she sounded a year ago with regard to the lack of leadership in official languages. This year, her report challenges the government to move immediately to the next step and put words into action to reverse the effects of inattention in recent years. "I have seen the first signs of serious reflection and a renewed willingness to work toward the full implementation of the *Official Languages Act*. This is a good start, but it is not enough. I am anxiously waiting to see this commitment reflected in concrete and vigorous action."

Among the promising signs, the Commissioner cites the Throne Speech of January 2001, in which the government renewed its commitment to protect minority official language communities and promote official languages. According to Dr. Adam, "these words must definitely set the tone for the years to come." The Clerk of the Privy Council has also recognized the importance of official languages by making them one of his priorities. In addition, the appointment in April of the Honourable Stéphane Dion as minister responsible for coordinating issues related to official languages holds out the promise of better coordination and stronger government leadership. Finally, Dr. Adam applauds the efforts of the Minister of Immigration, who included provisions in the new immigration and refugee protection bill recognizing that one of the objectives of immigration is to contribute to the development of official language communities.

In spite of these signs of renewed leadership, much remains to be done to redress the harm caused to linguistic duality by years of budget cuts, government transformations and, more generally, a lack of firm political and administrative commitment. Dr. Adam believes that the government must immediately state its intentions and unveil an action plan to ensure that all federal institutions comply with the letter and spirit of the *Official Languages Act*. This plan must mobilize the federal apparatus and include clear objectives, a series of well-targeted measures, and co-operative measures. A real shift in direction will also be needed to ensure that the necessary resources are invested to produce concrete, lasting and measurable results.

Among the challenges facing the government, the Commissioner stresses the importance of adopting a policy guaranteeing that government transformations and the transfer of responsibilities to other levels of government no longer adversely affect the language rights of citizens. A concerted approach with the provinces and territories is also needed to ensure that the Government of Canada better fulfils its linguistic responsibilities.

The studies and investigations conducted by the Office of the Commissioner this year have once again demonstrated the need for a profound change in culture in federal institutions. In fact, some institutions show resistance when the time comes to put lasting solutions into place. Issues relating to services to

2008-04506/

the public and language of work must be addressed with courage and determination by the most senior government officials. "Such a major change in culture must be based on the promotion of values consistent with the distinctiveness of both official language communities and an openness on both sides to the other community and its wealth."

This year, the Commissioner has devoted special attention to the linguistic performance of Air Canada, which has often earned the dubious distinction of having the greatest number of complaints against an institution for violations of the *Official Languages Act*. Canada's official languages policy is apparently not a priority for Air Canada's senior management. Dr. Adam invites the company to change its attitude and implement a rigorous strategy to strengthen and better manage the official languages program, as regards both service to the public and its own internal operations.

In her first report, the Commissioner succeeded in pushing the federal government to take some initial steps in the right direction; this second report must now prompt it to take vigorous action in the near future. "The road to linguistic duality may be paved with good intentions, but we can reach our destination only through concrete action and tangible results. The whistle has sounded; now let's see when the train leaves the station!" Dr. Adam concluded.

-30-

Information

[redacted]

Date modified: 2007-08-28